

Approved June 3rd, 2006 at AZGFD
Region 2 Headquarters, Arizona. Motion
by Ron Bemis, second by Jim Jett,
approved as presented by unanimous
vote.

Heritage Fund Public Advisory Committee Meeting
Meeting Minutes
January 21, 2006
Doubletree Paradise Valley Resort
Scottsdale, Arizona

Committee Members:

Bob Hernbrode, Tucson (Chairman) - Present
Paul Gomben, Show Low – Absent
Ron Smith, Pinetop-Lakeside - Present
Clair Harris, Flagstaff - Present
Maggie Sacher, Marble Canyon - Present
Jim Jett, Kingman – Present
Randy Lamb, Prescott - Present
Nick Heatwole, Yuma - Present

Valerie Morrill, Yuma - Present
Ron Bemis, McNeal – Present
Dennis Ward, Willcox - Absent
Tony Nelssen, Scottsdale - Present
Jerry Nelson, Scottsdale - Present
Diane Drobka, Safford - Present
Brian Pinney, Chandler - Present
Margaret Bohannon, Scottsdale - Present

1. Call to Order and Opening Remarks: Commissioner Bob Hernbrode, Chairman called the meeting to order at 8:00 a.m. The Chair opened the meeting with a discussion about HPAC members' role as volunteers and the statutory restrictions on reimbursing volunteers. He closed by expressing his appreciation on behalf of the Heritage Fund for their time, effort and dedication.

2. Introductions

- a. **Committee Members:** Chairman Hernbrode asked Committee members to introduce themselves.
- b. **Department Representatives:** Deputy Director Steve Ferrell, Heritage Fund Administrator Ashley Ross, and other present department staff introduced themselves.

2. Approval of Minutes from September 2005: Upon motion by Jim Jett and seconded by Ron Bemis, the minutes were unanimously approved.

3. Presenters: Ron Bemis, HPAC Member from Region V provided the committee an overview of the Heritage funded Whitewater Draw Wildlife Area, supported by a slide show. Ron Bemis began by outlining the role of the Heritage Fund as a protector of habitat and species for future generations, for our children and our children's children. He mentioned that he feels it is important for HPAC members to help direct Heritage funded projects, to keep projects grounded locally so they make sense for the community and to petition our legislators to support that funding.

The Whitewater Draw Wildlife Area in Cochise County sits in the middle of the Sulphur Springs Valley. It inhabits 1,680 acres of land with the wetted area eventually covering approximately half of that. It was originally acquired for its potential as unoccupied Aplomado falcon habitat as well as to protect sandhill cranes. On a landscape scale it is not a big refuge, but on a biologic scale it is a very important refuge. The wetland and grassland communities on the wildlife area provide feeding and loafing sites for sandhill cranes, waterfowl, and doves, in addition to numerous other terrestrial game and nongame species including bobcat, mountain lion, collared peccary, and mule deer.

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Ron Bemis focused the discussion around many of the problems faced by wildlife area managers and planners. Problems that were discussed included non-working wells, existing barns and paddocks, fencing and access roads. Emphasis was placed on the costs involved in improving and upgrading acquired properties such as Whitewater Draw. It was mentioned that Heritage funding pays for 72% of the annual operating costs not including salaries and benefits, which averages around \$25,000. The Heritage Fund has also purchased much of the equipment and improvements on the wildlife area including a backhoe, a tractor and accessories, OSHA required cabinetry, plumbing and well improvements, viewing platforms and spotting scopes. Funding has also been obtained from cooperators such as Duck's Unlimited, National Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the United States Department of Agriculture. Mr. Bemis highlighted the importance of partnering with neighboring landowners, farmers, communities and other interested organizations to make the most of the resources available and to provide incentive for further expansion and improvements to an area.

The Committee comment and discussion focused on questions regarding the aquifer, recreation, hunting, public use and problems with illegal immigrants. In regards to questions concerning the aquifer, which supplies the water for Whitewater Draw, Ron Bemis stated that the wildlife area is in a irrigation non-expansion area. There were previous problems with the aquifer and new irrigation uses were forbidden from any areas that weren't already irrigated between 1974 and 1978 because the water table was dropping. Over the last 10 years, the water table has risen about 4 feet, but development in the valley like the 40 acre tracts, the wells going down may have long term detrimental effects. Recreational opportunities are abundant for a variety of users, especially for bird watchers and hunters. Ron Bemis mentioned that hunting was allowed with non-center firing rifles and archery, only. Other questions focused on the use of the area by people and improvements required to accommodate visitors including installation of sanitary facilities, road and trail improvements and maintenance, viewing platforms, visitor use, hunting and parking barriers. Problems with illegal immigrants highly impact surrounding ranches and farms; however, problems have been limited on the wildlife area.

4. **Presenter:** Bob Hernbrode, Commission Chair provided an update on new proposed legislation that could affect the Heritage Fund. The first proposal deals with the monies appropriated from the Heritage Fund and is sponsored by Sportsmen for Wildlife. Essentially, the proposal is asking for the \$15 million that was swept from the Department to be returned to Arizona Game and Fish Department, but only to be used for specific projects as laid out by the group. \$10 million was swept from the Heritage Fund, and a combined \$5 million from the Off-Highway Vehicle and the Watercraft funds. The second proposal mentioned was House Bill 2509 (HB 2509), which would directly affect the Heritage Fund. HB 2509 would allow the Department to implement funding of multi-year projects by creating individually tagged and set aside accounts. The benefits are to long-term projects such as acquisition and development. HB 2509 is being backed by the Heritage Alliance. Also brought to the fore, was the discussion held during the September, 2005 HPAC meeting when the Committee discussed ways they could protect the Heritage Fund, including educating the public and contacting their legislators.

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Committee recommendation to the Commission: Upon motion by Ron Bemis, second by Claire Harris, the committee recommends that the Commission support House Bill 2509 in its present form. Motion passed by majority vote.

Committee comment and discussion focused on opportunities to support larger projects and the advantages of supporting HB 2509. Discussion was given to whether Committee members could comment or vote by telephone or other electronic methods on proposed bills. Concerns were raised about violating the public meeting laws. It was concluded that members are responsible for contacting people outside the Department about issues that may come up affecting the Heritage Fund. As Chairman Hernbrode receives updates, he will inform Ashley Ross, the Heritage Fund Administrator, so she can send notices to HPAC members. Another source of information is from the Heritage Alliance Internet page – www.azheritage.org.

5. **Presenter:** Ashley C. Ross, Heritage Fund Administrator presented an overview of the Heritage Fund annual report. The report will be continued during a subsequent meeting.
6. **Presenter:** Debbie Freeman, Heritage Public Information Officer presented information regarding the Department's Heritage Fund public information efforts during 2005. Topics highlighted during the presentation were awards received; community events; Heritage-related news releases, articles, and media coverage; legislative efforts; new publications; Focus: WILD Arizona; urban wildlife Web pages; the new Arizona Lottery public relations campaign; and the department's mountain lion awareness campaign.

Awards received in 2005 for Heritage Fund related projects were a National Award from the Association for Conservation Information (ACI) for the Heritage Public Awareness Campaign and the Governor's Pride in Arizona Award for Media Leadership for the Bald Eagle Management Program. The Heritage Fund-sponsored Department participation in several community events including the Arizona State Fair, celebration of the International Migratory Bird Day and the Tres Rios Nature Festival. Dozens of news releases, e-news letter articles, magazine articles and "Arizona Wildlife Views" TV segments highlighted Heritage funded activities across the state. Greater Heritage Fund grant coverage helped to increase grant proposal submission by 73% over 2004. Other points highlighted were the new brochures and publications produced in 2005, and the new urban wildlife Web pages that help to educate the public about urban interface problems.

The new Arizona Lottery campaign "Where does the money go?" and the mountain lion awareness campaign were discussed in more detail. The Lottery campaign is being handled by a professional public relations firm and will include new literature, television commercials, and web site placement. The mountain lion awareness campaign includes promoting an online educational curriculum and a lion tracking study.

Committee comment and discussion focused on the urban wildlife page and whether any communities were creating progressive programs to deal with urban wildlife interface and motorists. Questions were raised about whether there were any proposed campaigns to place

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signage in urban-wildlife interface areas. Ms Freeman suggested speaking with the urban wildlife specialist in the region to find out more about any proposed plans and that the Department had created and made available to the public educational videos such as "Living with Wildlife." Concerns were also expressed about how wildlife rehabilitators could receive Heritage Fund grants. Mention was made about how the Department refers to certain wildlife rehabilitators every time an injured bird or animal comes in. However, it was pointed out that they are not only private entities, but are also considered volunteers and so are not eligible to receive grants unless sponsored by a town or county, and volunteers cannot be paid by the Arizona Game and Fish Department.

7. **Presenter:** Jim deVos, Research Branch Chief gave a presentation about the Department's mountain lion tracking study. He briefly highlighted the technology (VHF – Very High Frequency) used in previous years, which did not give concise information about an animal's movements, and habitat use. VHF also had many limitations not experienced with new technology such as weather, limited opportunities for collecting information, and urban development. With the use of Global Positioning Systems (GPS), information is collected year round and at all hours of the day. Animals tracked with the use of GPS in Arizona include pronghorn antelope, deer, elk, mountain lions and bighorn sheep. Information is collected frequently so biologists can gain in depth knowledge of what an animal does at night, during the day, on weekends, or when heavy impact events occur such as military training or off-highway vehicle use. The use of GPS units in wildlife management studies has created a different view of how wildlife uses habitat and the impacts of urban interface areas. Information gained from these studies can be applied to other areas with similar problems. A long-term conflict involving pronghorn antelope in Anderson Mesa, is an example of this. After studying pronghorn movements and habitat needs, as revealed by the GPS study, a tangible goal was created that involved and satisfied all entities involved in the conflict. The knowledge gained about pronghorn antelope and its habitat needs could then be applied to other areas with similar situations. The latest study involving GPS tracking began in Tucson and Payson and measures mountain lion range, biology, behaviors, and habitat use. Additional benefits from this study include an online education program that incorporates social studies, math and biology, as well as helping the Department to answer difficult questions about wildlife in urban settings such as when and why are they there, and how can a community deal with it.

Committee comment and discussion revolved around questions about mountain lion biology, collaring issues and mountain lion behavior, and other areas that may benefit from mountain lion studies such as, Hualapai Mountain Park and the Mohave area. In response, Mr. deVos spoke about a proposal being developed that will look at mountain lion, sheep and cattle interactions in the Black Mountains and Tucson. References pertaining to mountain lions that were recommended included the Beast in the Garden by David Baron (ISBN 0-393-32634-9).

8. **Call to the Public:** No members of the public requested to be heard.

9. **Open Committee discussion**

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- a. **Open Committee Discussion.** The Chairman opened discussion. Concerns were raised by members about retention of quality people in the Department and how they could support increased pay rates. The Chairman thanked the departing members and gave out plaques to both the departing members and the members who were re-elected to the Committee. Ashley Ross discussed a survey that she and Robyn Beck created to try and answer questions raised about the Heritage Fund grant process at the September, 2005 meeting. The survey was passed out and further discussion will be needed. Some questions were raised about members participating on-line or by telephone. However, concerns were raised about it being a violation of the open-meeting laws.
 - c. **Future Meetings.** The Chairman and Committee discussed possible locations for the next two meetings. First choice for the May-June meeting was Hart Prairie Preserve; the second choice would be Payson and the Highway 260 studies. First choice for the fall meeting was at Sipe White Mountain Wildlife Area. Notice of dates and times will be forthcoming.
4. **Adjournment:** Committee adjourned at 12:00 pm.